

# A SUFI ITINERARY OF TENTH CENTURY NISHAPUR BASED ON A TREATISE BY ABŪ ‘ABD AL-RAḤMĀN AL-SULAMĪ

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What is sanctity? Is there a pathway to becoming a saint? The literature of Sufism, from the earliest works of Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932) and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 385/996) to the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 637/1240), has defined sanctity (*walāya*) theologically within the context of a journey in search of experiential knowledge of divine reality (*ma‘rifa*).<sup>1</sup> In Islam this journey is most often portrayed as a personal quest particular to each individual and time: ‘To each of you We have appointed a path and a way’ (Qur’ān, 5. 48). Each quest has its criteria, disciplines, stages, and contingencies based upon a specific model, or itinerary, the perilous nature of which traditionally necessitates the support of an experienced traveller or guide. Given the centrality to Islamic spirituality of the Prophet’s *Mīrāj* (the Night Journey),<sup>2</sup> this itinerary with its varied landscapes and ever-changing panoramas is metaphorically represented as an ascendant path through degrees or stations of experiential knowledge. Al-Sulamī’s (d. 412/1021) treatise *The Stations of the*

<sup>1</sup> I have translated *ma‘rifa* as ‘experiential knowledge of the divine’ rather than ‘gnosis’, which imports a nuance more specifically doctrinal than the Sufi connotation of this term. As the central theme of the text under consideration is the multi-faceted nature of *ma‘rifa*, the term is employed frequently and in a highly nuanced manner. I will therefore use the Arabic, allowing its subtleties to be determined by context rather than a fixed definition.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Sulamī dedicated a work to the *Mīrāj* entitled: *Mas’alat bayān laṭā’if al-mīrāj*, MS 2118, fos. 12<sup>a</sup>–18<sup>b</sup> in the compilation entitled *al-Sulamīyyāt* from the Library of the Muḥammad b. Sa‘ūd Islamic University of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Another early example of *Mīrāj* literature is Abū l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī’s (d. 455/1063) *Kitāb al-Mīrāj*, ed. A. H. ‘Abd al-Qādir (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1964).

*Righteous*<sup>3</sup> is a prototype to this approach and an important precursor to this genre of Islamic literature.

In this little studied treatise, one of the foremost fifth/eleventh century scholars of Sufism, discusses the integral principles behind the paths of the People of the Path of Blame (the *Malāmātiyya*),<sup>4</sup> the Sufis, and the

<sup>3</sup> The present study is based upon my recent critical edition of *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn fī l-taṣawwuf*. I based it on two newly discovered manuscripts: (1) MS 2118, fos. 53<sup>a</sup>–57<sup>b</sup> in *al-Sulamīyyāt* (see n. 1 above); (2) MS 1208 in compilation 91, fos. 227<sup>a</sup>–232<sup>b</sup>, listed under the title *al-Farq bayn al-taṣawwuf wa-l-malāma* (the manuscript itself lacks a title), Library of Ibn Yūsuf, Marrakesh, *Fihris makḥṭūṭāt Ibn Yūsuf fī Marrākush* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994), 331. Sezgin has erroneously cited this work under the title *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣāliḥīn* (GAS I, 673). His reference to the Fatih MS 2650/3 however, corresponds to Brockelmann's (GAL<sup>2</sup> I, 219) and H. Ritter's (*Oriens* 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 'Books and Periodicals' 397–99) less exact references to Fatih MS 2653 and 2650 respectively, both under the title *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn fī l-taṣawwuf*. I feel safe in assuming that the manuscript referenced in all these citations is the same. Süleyman Ateş based his critical edition of this treatise on the same Fatih MS, which he referenced as Fatih 2650, fos. 59<sup>a</sup>–69<sup>a</sup>. See al-Sulamī, *Tis'at kutub fī uṣūl al-taṣawwuf wa-l-zuhd li Abī 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā al-Sulamī*, ed. S. Ateş (Ankara: Ankara University Press, 1981), 141–51; (Beirut: al-Nāshir, 1993), 377–90. The edition of Dr. Ateş, based on a single manuscript, has a few misreadings and a lacuna of one folio at least (from *abā an yushrifā 'alā to illā izdāda fī nafsīhi tawādu'an*, (Ankara) 151; (Beirut) 390). That led me to prepare a second edition, which I hope will soon see the light of day. I did not have access to the Fatih MS for my critical edition, and so included the variant readings presented in the edition of Dr. Ateş within my critical apparatus. I have made my textual references in the present study, where possible, to the text of *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn fī l-taṣawwuf* edited by Dr. Ateş, using both the Ankara and Beirut editions. Shurayba does not include *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn fī l-taṣawwuf* among the works of al-Sulamī he cites. Brockelmann cites a work by al-Sulamī entitled: *Darajāt al-mu'āmalāt*, Berlin MS 3453 (GAL<sup>2</sup> I, 219). This title, however, represents a different work, see *Darajāt al-mu'āmalāt*, in *Tis'at al-kutub*, ed. S. Ateş, (Ankara) 21–6; (Beirut) 165–79. For a translation of the treatise under study see al-Sulamī: *Stations of the Righteous in Three Early Sufi Texts*, trans. K. Honerkamp (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2003), 111–28.

<sup>4</sup> On the *Malāmātiyya*, see EI<sup>2</sup>, art. 'Malāmātiyya,' Fr. de Jong, Hamid Algar, and Colin Imber; Abdūlbakī [Gölpınarlı], *Melāmīlik ve Melāmīler* (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931); al-Sulamī, *Risālat al-malāmātiyya*, ed. Abū l-A'lā al-'Afīfī (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1945); Sara Sviri, 'Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and the Malāmātī Movement,' in Leonard Lewisohn (ed.) *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi* (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 583–613; Fritz Meier, 'Khurasān and the End of Classical Sufism,' in *Essays in Islamic Mysticism and Piety*, trans. John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 215–17; Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 94–9; Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb Iṭḥbāt al-'ilal*, ed. Khālid Zahrī (Rabat: Muhammad V University, 1998), 24–5.

People of Love (*ahl al-maḥabba*). The organization of the treatise itself, its depiction of the stations of *maʿrifa*, and multiple references to *walāya*,<sup>5</sup> the concealed and revealed saints, and the ‘pole’ (*qutb*), all serve to establish a framework for a Sufi epistemology founded upon a hierarchy of subtle degrees of *maʿrifa*. Historically, the text sheds light upon the early theological foundations of the concept of sanctity in Islam. It also complements and contextualizes the works of al-Sulamī that have come down to us and reveals another, less studied facet of his thought and person. This treatise, when compared to others of his works, which focus on Sufi manners and customs, is more metaphysically oriented. The most singular aspect of this text, however, is the opportunity we have to meet al-Sulamī, best known to Western scholars as a Sufi hagiographer and Qurʾān exegete, as al-Sulamī the mystic,<sup>6</sup> mentor, teacher and transmitter of the spiritual tradition of his home city of Nishapur, that of the Malāmātiyya.

### ABŪ ʿABD AL-RAḤMĀN AL-SULAMĪ

His full name was Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā b. Khālīd b. Sālim b. Zāwīya b. Saʿīd b. Qabīsa b. Sarrāq al-Azdī al-Sulamī al-Nisābūrī. He was of Arab origin and known by the name Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī.<sup>7</sup> He was affiliated to the tribe of Azd on his father’s side;

See also: Honerkamp, *Three Early Sufi Texts*, 91–110; and the collected presentations from the International Conference on the *Malāmātiyya* and *Bayrāmī* Orders held in Istanbul in June, 1987 in *Melāmis-Bayrāmī*, eds. N. Clayer, A. Popovic, and T. Zarcone (Istanbul: Les Editions Isis, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> For a linguistic study of the term *walāya* and its derivatives, as well as an in-depth discussion on the hierarchy of saints in Islamic traditional literature, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints: Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d’Ibn ʿArabī* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 29–78.

<sup>6</sup> R. A. Nicholson considered al-Sulamī ‘a celebrated mystic’ (*Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921; repr. 1967), 14). F. Skali (ed. and trans., *al-Sulamī, Futuwah: Traité de Chevalerie Soufie* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1989), 7) wrote that even in his role as narrator and hagiographer al-Sulamī was able to ‘situate and classify this knowledge within a synthetic vision in accordance with the “grasp” of one that had himself tasted the intense spiritual savour [of intimate knowledge of God].’

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent survey of the life and works of al-Sulamī, see *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Shurayba (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1969), 11–47 and the biographical references cited there. See also: ʿAfīfī, *Risālat al-malāmātiyya*, 71–85; al-Sulamī, *Kitāb Ādāb al-ṣuḥba*, ed. M. J. Kister (Jerusalem: The Israel Oriental Society, 1954), Arabic introduction, 3–17; *ET*<sup>2</sup>, art. ‘al-Sulamī,’ G. Böwering; also by G. Böwering, ‘The Qurʾān Commentary of Al-Sulamī,’ in W. B. Hallaq and D. P. Little (eds.) *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 41–56. See also S. Ateş,

the appellation al-Sulamī was his mother's tribal affiliation to the Sulamīyīn, who had been among the immigrants to Nishapur early in the eighth century.

Al-Sulamī was born in Nishapur in 325/937 and died in the same city in 412/1021. He was of a prestigious family, well respected for their involvement in the intellectual pursuits of that city. Among his ancestors had been Aḥmad b. Yūsuf b. Khālīd al-Nīsābūrī, a famous scholar of Ḥadīth. Little is known of al-Sulamī's father, Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Azdī (d. 348/958).<sup>8</sup> He was among those who had frequented the early Malāmātiyya of Nishapur, and later migrated to Makka, leaving al-Sulamī under the care of his maternal grandfather, Abū 'Amr Ismā'il b. Nujayd al-Sulamī (d. 360/971).<sup>9</sup> Ibn Nujayd was a well-known Shāfi'ī scholar of Ḥadīth and spiritual heir to Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥīrī (d. 298/910), regarded as one of the founders of the Malāmātiyya

*Tis'at al-Kutub*, 5–140; Rkia E. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), 15–42; J-J. Thibon, 'Hiérarchie Spirituelle: Fonctions du Saint et Hagiographie dans l'Œuvre de Sulamī,' in R. Chih and D. Gril (eds.) *Le Saint et son Milieu (Cahier des Annales Islamologiques*, 19 (2000): Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale), 13–31. In the present biographical survey I will only touch on the aspects of al-Sulamī's life of relevance to the text under study.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Sulamī's father had close ties with the early Malāmātiyya of Nishapur. Of the four narrations al-Sulamī attributes to his father in *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* two are from Ibn Munāzil (d. 320/932), 271, 366, (al-Qushayrī referred to Ibn Munāzil as the *Shaykh al-Malāmātiyya*, *al-Risālat al-Qushayriyya*, ed. Ma'ūf Zurayq and 'Alī 'Abd al-Hamīd Balṭajī (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1993), 435); one narration from Abū 'Alī al-Thaqafi (d. 328/940), 361, (a disciple of both Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār and Abū Hafṣ) and the fourth is from Muḥammad al-Dīnūrī (d. 340/952), 477. Ibn al-Mulaqqin (*Ṭabaqāt al-awliya'*, ed. Shurayba (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānājī, 1973), 189) narrates that al-Sulamī's father based his *sulūk* upon correct comportment (*ḥusn al-khuluq*), continual striving (*dawām ijtihād*), and discerning speech in the science of human relationships (*lisān al-Ḥaqq fī 'ulūm al-mu'āmalā*); he also reports that al-Sulamī's father had met Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946), who had frequented al-Junayd and Khayr al-Nissāj. Al-Sulamī described him (*Ṭabaqāt*, 337) as 'unique in his time in both knowledge and spiritual state'.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Sulamī writes of his grandfather (*Ṭabaqāt*, 454–7): 'Abū 'Amr b. Nujayd Ismā'il b. Nujayd b. Aḥmad b. Yūsuf b. Sālim b. Khālīd al-Sulamī was my grandfather on my mother's side—may God bless him. He frequented Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥīrī. He was one of his most eminent companions and the last of the companions of Abū 'Uthmān to die. He met Junayd. He was among the most illustrious mentors (*mashāyikh*) of his times. He was unique in his practice of the path, due to his concealment of his interior state and the manner in which he guarded his intimate moments [with God]. He heard, narrated, and dictated *ḥadīth*. He was a reliable narrator (*thiqa*). He died in 360 [971].'

of Nishapur.<sup>10</sup> Al-Sulamī thus inherited the Malāmātiyya tradition at an early age from both his father and grandfather. In his youth he also studied theology, jurisprudence of the Shāfiʿī school, and travelled extensively in pursuit of Ḥadīth, until he became known as an authority in his own right. He was given a certificate of competence (*ijāza*) to issue formal legal opinions (fatwas) and to teach.<sup>11</sup> Yet like so many of the scholars of his day, he also sought instruction in the teachings and practices which were believed to lead to *maʿrifa*.

Al-Sulamī's early introduction to Sufism was within his grandfather's circle of associates. Abū Sahl Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Ṣuʿlūkī (d. 367/977), a Ḥanafī judge and companion of Ismāʿīl b. Nuḡayd, formally initiated al-Sulamī into Sufism and gave him permission to instruct novices.<sup>12</sup> Al-Sulamī also received initiation to the path at the hand of Abū l-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādhī (d. 367/978),<sup>13</sup> an important Shāfiʿī scholar of *ḥadīth* of Nishapur and a companion of Abū Sahl al-Ṣuʿlūkī. According to al-Jāmī, Abū l-Qāsim invested al-Sulamī with the Sufi mantle (*khirqā*).<sup>14</sup> Al-Sulamī, as his mentors had before him, exemplified a balance between the narration of *ḥadīth*, the study of jurisprudence and the transmission of the teachings and disciplines he had inherited from his teachers among the Malāmātiyya of Nishapur. For over forty years al-Sulamī, as an exemplar and mentor, taught from the small lodge<sup>15</sup> (*duwayra*) that he had built in his quarter of *sikka al-Nawand* in Nishapur. He died in 412/1021.

## THE ORIENTATION OF HIS WORKS

Scholars have regarded al-Sulamī's works<sup>16</sup> from a variety of perspectives. E. Kohlberg distinguishes two specific aims behind

<sup>10</sup> Abū ʿUthmān al-Ḥīrī of Nishapur (d. 298/910) had frequented Abū Ḥafṣ, the founder of the Malāmātiyya, and taken his spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*) from him. Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 170.

<sup>11</sup> See Kister (ed.), *K. Ādāb al-ṣuḥba*, 4 (Arabic). Also see Shurayba's introduction to *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 19–27, for a complete list of the scholars that Sulamī studied under.

<sup>12</sup> Tāj al-Dīn Subkī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā*, 6 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Husayniyya, 1906, iii. 61. For the sayings of Abū Sahl al-Ṣuʿlūkī see al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālat al-qushayriyya*, 65, 134, 251–2, 283, 334, 342 and 370.

<sup>13</sup> See the biography of him in al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 484–8.

<sup>14</sup> ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, Arabic edn., Muḥammad Adīb al-Jādir, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), i. 442.

<sup>15</sup> Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-zamān*, vol. 11, fo. 3, the events of 412. Cf. Shurayba (ed.), *Ṭabaqāt*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> For a list of al-Sulamī's works see GAS I, 671–4.

his works: 'to defend Sufism against its many critics, and to spread knowledge of Sufism both among the general public and among the Sufis.'<sup>17</sup> G. Böwering has divided al-Sulamī's work according to *genre*: 'Sufi hagiography, Sufi commentary on the Qur'ān, and treatises on Sufi manners and customs.'<sup>18</sup> The body of these works varies from collections of short Sufi aphorisms and manuals of correct comportment to erudite discourses on Sufi commentary on the Qur'ān and mystical theology.

Given the broad scope of his works, it is important to consider the audience for which a particular work was primarily intended: 1) a general interest audience, 2) a more erudite Sufi community, and 3) Sufi initiates (*murīdūn*).<sup>19</sup> An example of a work of general interest is his *Kitāb al-Arbā'īn fī l-taṣawwuf*,<sup>20</sup> a collection of forty *aḥādīth*, in which al-Sulamī presents the basic teachings of the Sufis through a narration of the deeds and sayings of the Prophet; in doing so he establishes the orthodox nature of Sufism. Another work in this category is '*Uyūb al-naḥs wa-mudāwātuhā*'<sup>21</sup> (*The Illnesses of the Lower Soul and Their Remedies*) which deals with self-purification and piety. Other works like *Kitāb al-Futuwwa*<sup>22</sup> (*The Book of Chivalry*), *Kitāb Jawāmī' ādāb al-ṣūfiyya*<sup>23</sup> (*The Book of Sufi Manners*) and *Bayān zalal al-ḥuqarā'*<sup>24</sup> (*The Stumblings of Those Aspiring*), a treatise dedicated to the essential nature of *faqr*, are compilations of *aḥādīth*, Sufi maxims, and poems that respond more explicitly to the question, 'What constitutes the Sufi path?' These works would appeal to both a general audience as well as one with an engaged commitment to Sufism as a devotional path.

<sup>17</sup> E. Kohlberg, in his introduction to: *al-Sulamī: Jawāmī' ādāb al-ṣūfiyya wa-'uyūb al-naḥs wa-mudāwātuhā* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976), 8–9. Dr. Kohlberg kindly sent me a copy of this out of print work, for which I am most appreciative.

<sup>18</sup> G. Böwering, 'The Quranic Commentary of al-Sulamī,' 45.

<sup>19</sup> See E. Kohlberg, *al-Sulamī: Jawāmī' ādāb al-ṣūfiyya*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> The text of this work has been edited with a critique of its Ḥadīth sources. See Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 906/1501), *Takhrīj al-'Arbā'īn al-Sulamīyya fī l-taṣawwuf*, ed. 'Alī 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> al-Sulamī, '*Uyūb al-naḥs wa-mudāwātuhā*', ed. E. Kohlberg (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976). For a translation, see *al-Sulamī: Les Maladies de l'Ame et leurs Remèdes*, trans. Abdul Karim Zein (Milan: Archè Edidit, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> al-Sulamī, *Kitāb al-Futuwwa*, ed. Süleyman Ateş (Ankara: Ankara University Press, 1977). For a translation, see *al-Sulamī: The Way of Sufi Chivalry*, trans. T. Bayrak (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1983). See also F. Skali, *al-Sulamī: Futuwwa*.

<sup>23</sup> See Kohlberg (ed.), '*Uyūb al-naḥs*', 1–68; ed. Ateş, (Ankara) 37–92; (Beirut) 173–289.

<sup>24</sup> *Bayān zalal al-ḥuqarā'*, ed. Ateş, (Ankara) 175–207; (Beirut) 429–63.

Other works are oriented towards a more erudite audience of initiated practitioners of Sufism. This category includes works such as *Darajāt al-mu'āmalāt*<sup>25</sup> (*Stations of Exemplary Comportment*), in which al-Sulamī defines thirty-four technical terms of Sufism; *Manābij al-ārifīn*<sup>26</sup> (*The Ways of the Gnostics*), a concise discussion of the Sufi path; *Sulūk al-ārifīn*<sup>27</sup> (*The Spiritual Journeying of the Gnostics*), in which al-Sulamī cites fifteen divergent points of view between the mystics of Khurasan and Baghdad; and the unpublished *Fuṣūl fī l-taṣawwuf*,<sup>28</sup> a collection of short discourses most probably preserved from al-Sulamī's personal teaching circle in Nishapur. These works all contain specialized vocabulary and refer to particular trends that marked Islamic mysticism in al-Sulamī's times.<sup>29</sup> In this third category, al-Sulamī deals most specifically with the practical aspects of spiritual journeying, the comportment incumbent upon the *murīd*, and the inner attitudes that he perceived as the foundational elements of all the degrees of *ma'rifa*. In these works we encounter al-Sulamī most clearly as the mystic and teacher in his own right. The *Stations of the Righteous* is an example *par excellence* of this third category of his works.

## STATIONS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

*Darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* opens, as is common in many texts of this era, with a question from a student to his teacher.<sup>30</sup> In this case the question is 'How are Sufism, the Path of Blame, and the Path of the People of Love

<sup>25</sup> al-Sulamī: *Darajāt al-mu'āmalāt*, ed. Ateş, (Ankara) 21–6; (Beirut) 165–79.

<sup>26</sup> al-Sulamī, *Manābij al-ārifīn*, ed. E. Kohlberg (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1979); ed. Ateş, (Ankara) 3–20; (Beirut) 141–50. (My thanks to Dr. E. Kohlberg for kindly sending me a copy of his edition.)

<sup>27</sup> al-Sulamī, *Sulūk al-ārifīn*, ed. Ateş, (Ankara) 153–69; (Beirut) 391–407.

<sup>28</sup> *Kitāb Fuṣūl fī l-taṣawwuf*, MS 1204, fos. 195<sup>b</sup>–226<sup>a</sup>, Ibn Yūsuf Library in Marrakesh, Morocco. For a summary of this text see J.-J. Thibon, 'La Relation Maître-Disciple ou Les Éléments de l'Alchimie Spirituelle d'après trois manuscrits de Sulamī', in Geneviève Gobillot (ed.) *Mystique Musulmane, Parcours en Compagnie d'un Chercheur: Roger Deladrière* (Paris: Editions Cariscript, 2002), 114–23.

<sup>29</sup> Two other works of al-Sulamī that deal almost exclusively with divergent tendencies within the Sufi community are his *Risālat al-Malāmatiyya* (ed. 'Afīfī), and *Kitāb Ghalaṭāt al-ṣūfiyya* in 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Aḥmad al-Fāwī Maḥmūd (ed.) *Uṣūl al-Malāmatiyya wa-ghalaṭāt al-ṣūfiyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'a al-Irshād, 1985), 175–200.

<sup>30</sup> Reminiscent of this question/answer format is the story of al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) and Junayd (d. 297/910), see Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā*, ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā, 12 vols.

distinguished from one another?<sup>31</sup> The treatise is a response to this question.

One might suppose from this opening passage that the text would comprise a three-part exposition on Sufism, the Path of Blame, and the Path of Love. Al-Sulamī's response, however, initiates a discourse on Sufism itself and the degrees of *ma'rifa* to which the journeyer (*sālik*) on this path ascends. He writes:

Know well . . . that these three names refer to outward characteristics based upon differing spiritual stations and varied points of view; and that both Blame and Love are stations among the stations of Sufism and innate characteristics of its totality.<sup>32</sup>

His response reflects his own perception of the essential unity in manifestation (*tawhīd*) that is an integral aspect of the Islamic mystical tradition. From here the *Darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* thus offers the reader a detailed itinerary of the journey through the stations of *ma'rifa* as they mirror the journeyer's gradual cognizance of the degrees of *tawhīd* as he eventually attains the station of sainthood. The treatise was intended for disciples already initiated to the language of Sufism. It has no summary of the preliminaries of Sufism and no conditions are set forth, such as submitting, on the level of comportment, to the Shari'a, while submitting, on the level of spiritual guidance, to a mentor or guide.<sup>33</sup> References to the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth and the sayings of the pious elders are used sparingly. The text is singularly devoid of aphorisms and commentary on Sufi manners and customs. From the first words of the treatise, al-Sulamī speaks with the authority of an experienced mentor (*murshid*), drawing the disciple's attention to the complementary nature of the varying modalities of Sufism, the Path of Blame and the Path of Love. For al-Sulamī the perception of unity within diversity provides the thread of continuity, central to all the stations of *ma'rifa*. Having alluded

(Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), x, 79–80. Also see the treatises of al-Muḥāsibī such as *Kitāb al-Rīʾāya li-huqūq Allāh*, eds. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1970), and *Kitāb al-Tawabuhum*, ed. A. J. Arberry (Cairo: 1937).

<sup>31</sup> ʿSaʿalta . . . an al-farq bayna al-taṣawwuf wa-turuq al-malāma wa-ahl al-maḥabba. Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn, (Ankara) 143; (Beirut) 379.

<sup>32</sup> ʿFaʿlam . . . anna hādhibi l-asāmī l-thalātha hiya simāt ʿalā ikhtilāf al-maqāmāt wa-tabāyuni l-amākin, wa-anna kulla wāḥidin min al-malāma wa-l-maḥabba maqām min maqāmāt al-taṣawwuf wa-khuluq min akhlāqihī. Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn, (Ankara) 143; (Beirut) 379.

<sup>33</sup> al-Sulamī, *Manāḥij al-ʿarīfīn* (ed. E. Kohlberg), 19–20.

to the integral nature of Sufism, he embarks without delay on a detailed description of the states and stations the journeyer must traverse and the degrees of *maʿrifa* that await him as he approaches the divine presence. He encourages the questioner, as if to say, ‘Do not allow yourself to become distracted here in diversity, the goal is still before you in the *Stations of the Righteous*.’

To facilitate the analysis of the text I have divided *Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* into eighteen sections.<sup>34</sup> Section one deals with the question posed by the disciple. Section two comprises the preamble prayer, and al-Sulamī’s concise response.<sup>35</sup> From his response al-Sulamī embarks upon a detailed discussion of the inner attitude most important to a successful completion of the journey, namely spiritual poverty (*faqr*).<sup>36</sup> For al-Sulamī *faqr* is the attitude that best corresponds to the innate human state: total dependency upon God. Self-sufficiency (*ghanā*) is the opposite of *faqr* and corresponds to the state of Lordship. The Qurʾān (2. 273) identifies the *fuqarāʾ* (pl. of *faqīr*) as ‘those sorely pressed in the way of God’ and assures that, ‘you will know them by their distinguishing signs’. Among the signs of *faqr* al-Sulamī mentions are total submission to destiny, obedience in the prescriptions of the religion, and placing one’s reliance on God. The true *faqīr* has been totally divested of discrete will, acts of obedience, and qualities. Al-Sulamī writes of the wayfarers at the end of the path, ‘[they are] empty of their attributes (*ṣifāt*) and innate temperaments (*ṭabāʾiʿ*).’<sup>37</sup>

Correct comportment in *faqr* is discussed in section three.<sup>38</sup> This reference to a normative concept of conduct concords with al-Sulamī’s three-fold schema of the path of *maʿrifa*: correct comportment (*ādāb*),

<sup>34</sup> I have followed the example of E. Kohlberg in his edition of *Manābij al-ʿarīfīn*. These divisions do not appear in the manuscripts I have consulted. Al-Sulamī’s well ordered discourse, however, lends itself to this kind of treatment, which I hope affords structure to the subject matter and makes the text as a whole more manageable for the reader.

<sup>35</sup> *Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 143; (Beirut) 379–80.

<sup>36</sup> *Faqr* is best translated ‘emptiness for God’ (*vacare Deo*). Al-Sulamī devoted a treatise to *faqr* and the faults of those who deviate from the *ādāb* of *faqr*, see *Bayān zalāl al-fuqarāʾ* (ed. S. Ateş) *Tisʿat al-kutub*, (Ankara) 185–207; (Beirut) 431–56. I have re-edited this text using a newly discovered manuscript from the Ben Yūsuf Library of Marrakesh, compilation 91: fos. 174<sup>a</sup>–187<sup>b</sup>. For a translation of this treatise see K. Honerkamp, *al-Sulamī: Stations of the Righteous*, 129–71.

<sup>37</sup> *Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 150; (Beirut) 389.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, (Ankara) 143–4; (Beirut) 379–80.

inner attitudes (*akhlāq*)<sup>39</sup> and mystical states (*aḥwāl*).<sup>40</sup> The themes developed in *Darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* remain true to this pattern. The first step on the path is sincere repentance, and the renunciation of all personal aspirations through service to others. The second step is constant vigilance over one's interior states, which is the sole means to the third step, the realization that all one's acts and states are defective and worthy of contempt.<sup>41</sup> Al-Sulamī's portrayal of the journeyer here is reminiscent of the *malāmī* ideal of a life spent in worship and service to others while never seeing oneself worthy of esteem, nor finding repose in the accomplishment of virtue. He writes:

Among the comportment that brought them to this station and this degree is the spiritual discipline (*riyāḍiyyāt*) they impose upon themselves, preceded by sound repentance, then perfect detachment, turning from all other than God—from the world and its inhabitants—the abandonment of all they own, distancing themselves from all familiar things (*ma'lufāt*), departure upon long journeys, denial of outward passionate desires, constant watchfulness over their innermost secrets (*al-asrār al-bāṭina*), deference towards the mentors, service to brethren and friends, preference to others over themselves in worldly goods, person, and spirit, perseverance in [their] efforts at all times, and regarding all that may arise from them inwardly or outwardly—of their actions or their states—with contempt and disdain.<sup>42</sup>

Section four<sup>43</sup> treats the inner attitudes that must accompany the outer disciplines of *faqr*. The journey thus far, al-Sulamī relates, is still self-motivated and has not gone beyond self-directed striving (*irāda*). Now is the time for the journeyer to direct his efforts inwardly calling upon his lower self to turn from dependence upon itself and the world and place its trust in God in all its concerns. Al-Sulamī remarks here how 'returning to God (*al-rujū' ilā Allāh*) in all things'<sup>44</sup> leads directly to the degree of certainty (*yaqīn*). Certainty is then followed by the most praiseworthy of degrees among the wayfarers—the degree

<sup>39</sup> The term *akhlāq* in current usage generally refers to conduct or character. In the traditional Islamic sources *akhlāq* is used to refer to traits of character founded upon interior attitudes. It is therefore essential to read Sulamī's use of the term *akhlāq* not as 'conduct', but rather as 'interior attitudes'.

<sup>40</sup> al-Sulamī, *Manāḥij al-ʿarīfīn* (ed. Kohlberg), 38.

<sup>41</sup> See al-Sulamī, *Risālat al-Malāmīyya*, tenets 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15, 19, 20, 26, 32, 35, 36, 40, 45.

<sup>42</sup> *Maṣ'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 144; (Beirut) 380.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., (Ankara) 144–5; (Beirut) 380–1.

<sup>44</sup> This implies seeing God as the sole agent, from whom all acts within creation originate.

of total renunciation of self-direction (*tafwīd*) and submission (*taslīm*) to divine will. These interior attitudes, in al-Sulamī's estimation, define one's behaviour in times of trial. The aspirant first realizes patience, then equal acceptance of both affliction and comfort until he perceives that the higher good lies in affliction and he prefers it to ease, with neither pretension nor feelings of self-denial detracting from his inward state. When he has attained this stage of inner and outer submission to divine will (*riḍā*), he regards others with deference and views all beings with the eye with which God views creation (*bi-ʿayn al-Haqq*).<sup>45</sup>

The journeyer in this lofty station does not lose sight of the flawed nature of his soul, and he fears that the states of *tafwīd*, *taslīm*, and *riḍā* that have come before may be tainted with self-deception and that he is being led on by subtle degrees (*istidrāj*). His fear, however, is offset with hope and confidence in God's attribute of compassion. He knows that only by divine aid will he be purified of the imperfections of these stations and preserved from erring. Here al-Sulamī provides the epistemological foundation, which necessitates constant vigilance over the lower soul (*nafs*) in all its states, that marked the Malāmatiyya. For al-Sulamī constant vigilance over the lower soul was a precursor to the stations of *maʿrifa*.

In sections five through seven<sup>46</sup> al-Sulamī treats the stages that mark the transition from *irāda* to *maʿrifa*. He forewarns the journeyer, however, that no one accesses the stations of *maʿrifa* through the perfection of their spiritual discipline or intention.<sup>47</sup> This station is marked by a return to the initial stages of the journey after the journeyer has traversed all the stations a first time. Al-Sulamī addresses this question in section five, citing two well known figures of formative Sufism, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874)<sup>48</sup> and Abū ʿUthmān

<sup>45</sup> Al-Sulamī relates in *Manābij al-ṣādiqīn*, 'When the station of true *faqr* becomes manifest to them they enter the station of compassion towards all created beings (*al-shafaqa ʿalā l-khalq*). *Manābij al-ʿarifīn* (ed. Kohlberg), 34.

<sup>46</sup> *Masʾalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 145–6; (Beirut) 381–2.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Sulamī, writing of the Malāmatiyya, notes that 'for them it is through the perfection of striving that one achieves all the stations except the station of *maʿrifa*.' *Risālāt al-malāmatiyya*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, Tayfūr b. ʿĪsā b. Sarūshān (d. 261/874), a Sunni Sufi from Iran, well known for his ecstatic states and sayings. See al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt*, 67–74, Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, x. 325–31. In early works on Sufism Abū Yazīd is often represented as an early exemplar of the Malāmatiyya in Khurasan.

al-Maghribī (d. 370/984).<sup>49</sup> These narrations confirm al-Sulamī's view that unless the journeyer has revisited his earlier states, after having attained the station of *ma'rifa*, he will never realize the inherent deficiencies of his lower soul. When discernment of the subtle degrees of *ma'rifa* begins, al-Sulamī relates, the journeyer becomes able to differentiate the inner motivating agents of the self: inspiration, temptation, rational thought, inclination, miracles, self-deception, certainty, and being led on by subtle degree from one to another. It is not until this final stage before the station of *ma'rifa* that the aspirant attains to the state of inner equilibrium (*al-istiqāma*) and reposes in God's presence. This is the state of stability. All the domains of the soul: the lower soul itself, the innermost soul (*sirr*), volition (*irāda*), natural inclinations (*ṭab'*), thought (*fikr*), and the reflective faculty (*khāṭir*) are at last in equilibrium.

In section seven al-Sulamī reminds the disciple that the only person to have perfectly attained this elevated station was the Prophet and that anyone else's attainment to it will never be free of deficiency.<sup>50</sup> This is the state of perfected servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) in which one submits totally to one's Lord with neither predilection nor goal. All one's striving is left to the will of God. In no state does the journeyer attain perfection, for he changes as willed by his Lord. Here al-Sulamī discusses the necessity of the relinquishment of self-direction (*tark al-irāda*).<sup>51</sup> For al-Sulamī, total renunciation of one's aspiration and striving is a prerequisite to attaining 'the stations of the righteous', not the result.

The remaining sections, eight to eighteen,<sup>52</sup> of the *Darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* comprise one of the most detailed discourses on *ma'rifa* found in the

<sup>49</sup> al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 479: 'Sa'id b. Sallam from Qayrawān spent much of his life in Makka and became the chief *shaykh* thereof. He was unique in his assiduous worship and asceticism. He was as a vestige of the early masters and their epoch. No one has seen one as noble or constant in each moment or as authoritative in true intuition (*firāsa*) and reverential awe (*hayba*). He (later) migrated to Nishapur, where he died in 373/984.'

<sup>50</sup> *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 145; (Beirut) 382.

<sup>51</sup> *Tark al-irāda* has been a modality of Islamic mysticism from the formative period to later times. It served as the pivotal point around which the rejuvenation of Sufism turned in the seventh/thirteenth century with the founding of the Shādhiliyya order, its flowering in Egypt, and its subsequent spread to much of the Muslim world. See Victor Danner, 'The Shādhiliyyah and North African Sufism' in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.) *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations* (New York: Crossroads, 1991) 26–48; also see Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, *al-Tanwīr fī isqāt al-tadbīr*, published numerous times in Cairo, and Paul Nwyia, *Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh et la naissance de la confrérie shādhilite* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986).

<sup>52</sup> *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 146–51; (Beirut) 382–90.

writings of formative Sufism. In his treatment, al-Sulamī avoids the doctrinal orientation of the compendia of early Sufism<sup>53</sup> in favour of a more epistemologically oriented discourse in which *maʿrifa* is contextualized within a process of spiritual development functioning upon multiple centres of experience—the reason, the heart, and the spirit. This approach sets the *Stations of the Righteous* apart from those compendia. In this respect this treatise has a singular place even among the other works of al-Sulamī.<sup>54</sup>

In the initial stations of *maʿrifa*, as al-Sulamī recounts to the journeyer, the dawning of knowledge of the divine effaces all that went before; yet the journeyer's self, deeds, and states have not become totally effaced. He is not yet devoid of all that is latent in him; he manifests qualities, yet he is not confirmed in them. As the journeyer perceives the initial lights of this station, he is purified, permitted access to the unseen, and may apprise others of that which accords with destiny. This is the intuition (*firāsa*) mentioned in the *ḥadīth*. 'Beware the intuition of the believer,

<sup>53</sup> In the compendia of formative Sufism, *maʿrifa* tended to be treated as a technical term (*muṣṭalah*). The concept of *maʿrifa* within the context of early Sufi epistemology differentiated Sufism from other areas of Islamic intellectual endeavour and, as the Sufis saw it, made Sufism superior to all other pursuits; see Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), the chapter, 'Discourse on the superiority of *maʿrifa* and *yaqīn* over all other sciences' in *Qūt al-Qulūb* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1995), 237–8. This perception of *maʿrifa* as that which set Sufism apart from the other Islamic sciences led the authors of the early compendia to feel a need to provide a concise definition for it—as they had for other Sufi terms, such as *al-fanaʾ* (extinction) and *al-baqāʾ* (permanence). The definitions in these works vary and are often presented in a question/answer format, in which one of the early Sufis would be asked, 'What is *maʿrifa*?' These definitions often tended to be doctrinal pronouncements that reflected the particular point of view of the person asked. See Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 384/994–5), *al-Taʿarruf li madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993), 151–3; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, 311–17; Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), *al-Lumaʾ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Bāqī Surūr (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1960), 65–104; ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d. circa 465/1071), *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, trans. R. Nicholson (Gibb Memorial, revised edn., 2000), 267–77. For an excellent study of the early development of Islamic mystical theology and translations of the above texts, see *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism, Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, introd. and trans. J. Renard (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> In other works al-Sulamī has treated *maʿrifa* as a technical term and provided the more concise definitions we would expect of a work of this period. See al-Sulamī, *Darajāt al-muʿāmalāt*, ed. Ateş, (Ankara) 30; (Beirut) 176; *Kitāb al-Muqaddima fī l-taṣawwuf*, ed. S. Ateş, (Ankara) 101; (Beirut) 306.

for he sees by the light of God.<sup>55</sup> More profound yet is the faculty, also attained by those in this station, which enables one to ascertain with certainty the outcomes of as yet undisclosed events. Al-Sulamī writes at the beginning of this section, ‘these stations are all the first stations of *maʿrifa*’ (*awāʾil maqāmāt al-maʿrifa*).

Here al-Sulamī discusses the nature of the *maʿrifa* stating, as did al-Junayd before him that, ‘*Maʿrifa* is denial (*al-maʿrifa inkār*), and may only truly be realized through denial of all but the Known (*al-maʿrūf*)’. He interprets al-Junayd as meaning that no one may claim a degree of *maʿrifa* while affirming any secondary cause of joy or dread, or while seeking refuge from other than God. For al-Sulamī, ‘denial of all but the known’ is the key to sincerity (*ikhhlās*) a prerequisite to the stations of *maʿrifa*.

In section nine al-Sulamī comments on the well-known Sufi saying, ‘He who knows his self, knows his Lord.’<sup>56</sup> He interprets this to mean that one cannot know God while being cognizant of the *nafs* and that ‘when one forgets the *nafs*, he knows his Lord’. Al-Sulamī supports this point of view with citations from two well-known masters of Khurasan: Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī (d. 245/859–60),<sup>57</sup> a disciple of Hātim al-Aṣamm,<sup>58</sup> and Abū ʿUthmān al-Hīrī, a disciple of Abū Ḥafṣ.<sup>59</sup> Their narrations emphasize the complementary relationship between the fulfillment of God’s decrees and commands on the level of Sharīʿa and experiential knowledge of God. Sincerity, the result of the journeyer’s earnest practices, results in veracity (*ṣidq*), the essence of

<sup>55</sup> See al-ʿAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafāʾ wa-muzīl al-ilbās ʿammā ishtahara min al-aḥādīth ʿalā alsinat al-nās*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1988), i. 42–3.

<sup>56</sup> This is usually reported as a *ḥadīth*, but al-Sulamī relates it here as a saying of one of the venerable elders (*ʿan baʿḍ al-salaf*). For a treatise devoted to the mystical interpretation of this saying, see Awhād al-Dīn Balyānī, *Epître sur l’Unité Absolue*, introd. and trans. M. Chodkiewicz (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1982).

<sup>57</sup> Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 146: his name is ʿAskar b. Ḥusayn; he frequented Abū Hātim al-ʿAṭṭār al-Baṣrī and Hātim al-Aṣamm al-Balkhī; he was among the most illustrious of the masters of Khurasan, renowned for knowledge and nobility of character (*futuwwa*), reliance upon God, asceticism, and piety.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 91–7: Hātim al-Aṣamm from Balkh (d. 230/844) was among the earliest *mashāʾikh* of Khurasan; he associated with Shaqīq b. Ibrāhīm [al-Balkhī] and was the teacher of Aḥmad b. al-Ḥaḍrawayh. He is often seen as a precursor to the Malāmīyya tradition of Nishapur.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 115–22: Abū Ḥafṣ (d. 270/883) was known as one of the earliest mentors of the Malāmīyya of Nishapur. He is often reputed to be among the originators of the Malāmīyya.

sincerity, through which the journeyer attains to the stations of the *Ṣiddiqīn*.<sup>60</sup> Those who attain these stations, in accordance with a well-known *ḥadīth*, are envied by the Prophets and martyrs alike.<sup>61</sup> Al-Sulamī commenting upon this *ḥadīth* as it relates to the elevated states of the *ṣiddiqīn*, emphasizes that the state of prophecy is higher and more perfect than the state of the *ṣiddiq*.

One of the people of *maʿrifa* was asked about this *ḥadīth* of the Prophet's, 'they are envied by the prophets and martyrs.' 'How might the prophets envy them when they [the prophets] are above them in rank?' To which he answered, 'Because the prophets were occupied with the obligation of the proclamation [of their message] and being witnesses to all created beings, while those [who are envied] bore not that burden, hence nothing distracted them from God. For this reason the prophets envy them, even though the state of prophecy is higher and more perfect.'<sup>62</sup>

In section ten, the traveller, now firmly established and confirmed in the station of sincerity, is admitted to the station of *maʿrifa*. Commenting on the nature of this station al-Sulamī writes:

Then upon being established in the Station of Sincerity, in *maʿrifa* of God, and knowledge (*ilm*) of Him, sustained through Him by extinction from all other than He, collected in Him, dispersed from all that is not He, he enters the fields of proximity and communion, whereupon he is known as one who has arrived at the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) through his separation from all that is other than He.<sup>63</sup>

This station is the point of embarkation upon the path of the ninety-nine Divine Names. This is the station of no station; the journeyer, effaced to

<sup>60</sup> Al-Ghazālī (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, ed. Muḥammad al-Dālī Balṭa [Beirut: al-Maktabat al-ʿAṣriyya, 1996], iv. 517) situates the Station of the *Ṣiddiqiyya* (the veracious) as the highest degree attainable before that of Prophethood, which for him is definitively closed. Ibn al-ʿArabī, influenced by al-Sulamī, suggests (*al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, ii. 249.30) that there is an intermediary station, namely the Station of Proximity (*maqām al-qurbā*), between this station and the ultimate Station of Prophethood. Cf. M. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1986), 77, 142.

<sup>61</sup> 'God has servants that are neither apostles nor martyrs, [yet] the apostles and martyrs envy them . . .', is part of a lengthy *ḥadīth* reported in many *ḥadīth* collections. See al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī, 25 vols. (n.p.: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2nd edn., 1983) narrated by Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās al-Muʿaddib, iii. 291, *ḥadīth* 3435; al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, 13 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, n.d. *Bāb al-zuhd*, ix. 235; also cited in *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, iv. 216.

<sup>62</sup> *Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 147; (Beirut) 384.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. (Ankara) 147; (Beirut) 384–5.

himself, is sustained in God (*yabqā ma' a l-Haqq bi-lā maqām*). Of these stations of the ninety-nine names and of the journeyer as he progresses through them, Al-Sulamī writes:

To each of these stations corresponds a state in which the traveller is in direct relationship with one of these names, the grace (*baraka*) of which becomes manifest through his person. That name is the place from which he drinks (*mashrab*), his spring (*mawrid*), and his place of origin (*maṣdar*). Each of these stations bathes him in its own light and luminosity, no one resembling the preceding one, until the traveller reaches the outermost limits [of his path] (*aqṣā al-nihāyāt*). Here he has traversed all the stations and subsists with God (*al-Haqq*), having neither station, locale, name, form, quality, pretence, desire, sight, vision (*mushāhada*), striving (*sa'y*) nor goal (*ṭalab*). The servant is as though he were not, and God (*al-Haqq*) is as He has always been.<sup>64</sup>

In the following station, discussed in section eleven, the journeyer beholds the knowledge of the hidden nature of things (*'ilm al-bāṭin*); 'God's secrets, which are revealed only to the *umana'* (trustworthy) among the saints.' This is the knowledge from the divine presence (*al-'ilm al-ladunī*) referred to in the Qur'ānic story of Moses and Khadir.<sup>65</sup> This knowledge, al-Sulamī relates, in and of itself suffices to convince any listener of its veracity, with need of neither proof nor reasoned argument. This mystical knowledge overwhelmed Moses even though he was, as a prophet—al-Sulamī stresses—still superior to Khidr in state and station.

The journeyer in section twelve,<sup>66</sup> as al-Sulamī continues his narrative, is admitted to the knowledge of the secrets of the inner nature of things (*'ilm bāṭin al-bāṭin*). He beholds these secrets by the purity of his own inner secret (*sirr*), the strength of his states, and his extinction from his own qualities. The early Companions of the Prophet knew this station. Al-Sulamī narrates that 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās (d. 68/687) said, 'God bless 'Umar (d. 23/644), it is as though he regards destiny through a thin veil.' The early Sufis also had experienced this station. Al-Sulamī relates that

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. (Ankara) 148; (Beirut) 385.

<sup>65</sup> Qur'ān, 18. 60–82. al-Khadr: 'the name of a popular figure in legend and story. Al-Khadr is properly an epithet ("the green man"); this was in time forgotten and this explains the secondary form "Khidr" (approximately, "the green"), which in many places has displaced the primary form.' *EI*<sup>2</sup> art. 'al-Khadr', A. J. Wensinck. Ibn al-'Arabī (*al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, ii. 5.25) considered al-Khadr to be one among the three prophets (the two others are Elias and Jesus) who continue to live in the worldly dimension.

<sup>66</sup> *Maṣ'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara), 148; (Beirut), 385–6.

one day Abū Muḥammad al-Jarīrī<sup>67</sup> asked his disciples, 'Is there one among you who knows what will arise from the unseen before it appears?' and when they answered 'No', he said, 'Weep over hearts brought far from God.' Depicting the state of the journeyer in this station, al-Sulamī writes: '[They are those whose] hearts are never absent from the divine presence (*al-ḥaḍra*); they are never unaware of God (*al-Ḥaqq*), nor do they disperse themselves in companionship with others.'

In section thirteen, al-Sulamī provides important perspectives into the ontological theology of early Sufism. He contrasts, through the eyes of the journeyer, the inherent deficiency of the created order of being with God's perfection. Al-Sulamī writes of the journeyer as he attains this station:

From these states the aspirant ascends to a state in which he deems miracles insignificant. This is the moment of witnessing of God's glory, omnipotence, and magnificence. All else appears deprecated in his eyes, and through his perception of the defective nature of all appearances he realizes that the locus of created being (*maḥall al-ḥawāḍith*) will never be devoid of defects.<sup>68</sup> Thus, upon witnessing divine design (*ṣunʿ*) he is intimately drawn to its freedom from all imperfection. When he witnesses the locus in which the divine design appears, he feels estranged, conscious of the defects [inherent in creation]. This is among the stations of the illustrious and the masters [of the path].<sup>69</sup>

Al-Sulamī's perception of an inherently flawed created order implied that, even though the aspirant might approach complete effacement in God, the context of self-awareness would always mediate the mystical knowledge of God.<sup>70</sup> He depicts the journeyer's dilemma, as one caught

<sup>67</sup> Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 259: Abū Muḥammad al-Jarīrī (d. 311/923–4) was one of al-Junayd's greatest disciples. He also frequented Sahl b. 'Abdallāh al-Tustarī. He succeeded al-Junayd as the *shaykh ṣūfiyya Baghdād* because of his perfection of state and knowledge.

<sup>68</sup> '*fa idhā shāhada al-ṣunʿ anisa bibi li-khuluwwihi ʿan kulli ʿilla, wa-idhā shāhada maḥall ibdāʾ al-ṣunʿi minhu istawḥasha li-ruʾyat al-ʿilal.*'

<sup>69</sup> *Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 150; (Beirut) 389.

<sup>70</sup> Abū l-Aʿlā Affīfī, author of *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyīd Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), who had studied with R. A. Nicholson and was among the early Egyptian scholars to do research on Sufism, believed that the continued awareness of self at the highest levels of *maʿrifa*, prevented the Malāmātiyya from developing the all-encompassing doctrine of divine unity known among the Sufis of Iraq. See *Risālat al-malāmātiyya*, 22. Jean-Jaques Thibon ('Hiérarchie Spirituelle', 21) has noted that the essential nature of this 'ontological imperfection of creation' may furnish the basis for the mistrust the Malāmātiyya expressed towards miracles (*karāmāt*).

between his perceptions of the divine and created orders when he writes: 'This is a time of purity in impurity and impurity in purity.'<sup>71</sup> Illustrating his point he contrasts Moses' quest for fire (Qur'ān, 27. 7–10) and Adam's quest for eternal life in proximity to God (20. 120–3). While Moses seeks fire for his family, an outwardly mundane task, he finds proximity to God, and knows divine discourse. Adam, on the other hand, seeking the lofty ideal of eternal proximity to God (the reason given in the Qur'ān for his partaking of the forbidden fruit) is expelled and abased.

In this section al-Sulamī eloquently treats the transformative epistemology behind the spiritual evolution of the journeyer as he passes through the stations of *ma'rifa*. Particular to his portrayal is the impact the multiple degrees of *ma'rifa*, depicted in this section as intimate discourse (*samā'*), unveiling (*kashf*), and understanding (*fahm*), have upon a hierarchy of subtle centres of human consciousness.<sup>72</sup> In this station the journeyer hears divine discourse and finds proximity to God wherein he resides in repose from the distractions of creation. Al-Sulamī writes of the aspirant's experience in this station:

This is the moment wherein permission is granted [the journeyer] to intimate discourse [with God] and to have its meanings unveiled to him. He is honoured by the understanding of what he hears, by being addressed, and by witnessing the inner meaning of hearing and cognition thereof, increasing his proximity and intimacy. God said [Qur'ān, 50. 37]: *Lo! Therein verily is a reminder for him who has a heart or has listened attentively while witnessing (shuhūd)*. [This is also] the moment of finding (*wujūd*), repose (*rawḥ*) in the innermost secret (*al-sirr*), heavenly fragrance (*rayḥān*) in the heart, light in the innermost secret, and illumination (*ḍiyā'*) in the breast (*ṣadr*). God said [56. 88–9]: *Thus if he is of those brought nigh, then [he shall find] divine bliss, heavenly fragrance, and a garden of bounty*. Thus divine bliss brings deliverance to their innermost secrets from [the distractions of] creation through union with its Creator; while the

<sup>71</sup> *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 150; (Beirut) 388–9: '*huwa awān wujūd al-kudūra fī l-ṣafā' wa-l-ṣafā' fī l-kudūra*.'

<sup>72</sup> A central teaching of the Malāmīyya was that individual human states are reflected within a hierarchy of subtle centres of consciousness, referred to as *rūḥ*, *sirr*, *qalb*, and *nafs*. At the summit of the hierarchy was the divine rendered manifest to the *rūḥ* (spirit). The *sirr* (innermost mystery) relates to the spiritual realm. The *qalb* (heart) relates to the intermediate realm between the worldly and spiritual realms, and the *nafs* (ego-self) relates to the worldly or mundane realm. Within this hierarchy the superior centres were cognizant of the inferior realms, not vice versa. The *rūḥ* was cognizant of the totality of the multi-leveled nature of spiritual reality, while the *nafs* was cognizant of only its own realm. See al-Sulamī, *Risālat al-Malāmīyya*, 100–4.

heavenly fragrance, here refers to the repose of their hearts in God (*al-Ḥaqq*) at the commencement and at the end [of their journey].<sup>73</sup>

In section fourteen the journeyer's security (*amn*) is guaranteed him. These tidings reach him by means of inspiration (*waḥy*), the word of a prophet, the intuition of a saint (*firāsāt walī*), witnessing of the unseen (*mushāḥadat al-ghayb*), or personal intuition (*musāmarat khāṭir*). Al-Sulamī cites here several *ahādīth* in which the Prophet announced to certain of his Companions their eventual places in Paradise. He cites the example of the story of Uways al-Qaranī.<sup>74</sup>

In section fifteen the journeyer ascends to the Station of Realized Sainthood. In this station subtle degrees of awe, reverence, and apprehension take the place of the dismay and fear that perplexed the journeyer in the earlier stations. The principle behind this diversity, al-Sulamī affirms, is the deficiency inherent in all phenomena. He writes of the journeyers who have attained to this station:

When God has brought one of His servants to the Station of Realized Sainthood (*taḥqīq al-walāya*), he is freed of attitudes of fear; whereas solemn awe (*hayba*) never leaves him. Those who have reached this station vary in degree. Some are brought from a state of fear to a state of apprehension (*khashiya*), while others, of subtler nature, are brought to the state of fearful awe (*rahba*). This is because the locus of phenomena cannot possibly be devoid of defects.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 149; (Beirut) 386–87. Al-Sulamī's depiction of this station is reminiscent of the *maqām al-qurba* (the Station of Proximity) where Ibn al-ʿArabī describes meeting al-Sulamī some two centuries later. He reports that this is the *maqām* al-Sulamī had attained when he died. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, ii. 260.8–262.32. Also see D. Gril's translation of this passage in 'Le terme du voyage,' in Ibn ʿArabī, *Les Illuminations de la Mecque*, ed. M. Chodkiewicz (Paris: Sindbad, 1988), 339–47.

<sup>74</sup> 'A legendary or semi-legendary younger contemporary of Muḥammad, said to have been killed at the battle of Šifīn in 37/657, fighting on the side of ʿAlī. The *nisba* al-Ḳaranī connects him with the Ḳaran sub-group of the Yemeni tribe of Murād, and legend puts his early life in Yemen. Uways first appears in the works of writers of the 3rd/ 9th century, Ibn Ṣa'd and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, as an impoverished and ragged figure who chose to live a life of solitude. Muḥammad had allegedly foretold that Uways would come to see his second successor, ʿUmar, and said that Uways was both his bosom friend (*khalīl*) in the Muslim community and the best person in the generation after him.' EI<sup>2</sup> art. 'Uways al-Ḳaranī,' J. Baldick. For more on the Uwaysiyya see J. Baldick, *The Imaginary Muslims: Uwaysi Sufis of Central Asia* (New York: University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 150; (Beirut) 388–9.

In this station the element of fear may dominate the servant and his attributes become embodied in one of the divine attributes. He loses all his individuating qualities and inclinations.<sup>76</sup> Lost to himself in proximity to God he manifests the truth of the divine when he speaks. Of this station al-Sulamī continues:

It may come to pass that divers degrees of fear gain dominion over the servant, and his own qualities will fade away. This is as God mentioned in His venerable book [38. 47–8]: *We purified him with a pure thought, remembrance of the hereafter. Verily in our sight they are of the elect, the excellent.* His state is such that his attributes become embodied in an attribute of the [divine] attributes, until the servant is empty of all his attributes and inclinations. He speaks from pure truth (*ṣirf ḥaqq*), and communicates the purity of a divine reality (*ṣafā' ḥaqīqa*).<sup>77</sup>

Al-Sulamī likens this station to a flash of lightening. It is without duration. For were it to endure, he writes, it would drive one to distraction in its raptures and bring one to naught. Al-Sulamī culminates his discourse on this station with the rhetorical question: 'How many there are [on this path] mad with love and brought to naught in this station?'<sup>78</sup>

Section sixteen treats the role of the journeyer who, after having attained to the station of Realized Sainthood and divine proximity, returns to live among humankind. For these journeyers there is one of two possibilities: they may be concealed among the crowd and live unnoticed, or they may be made known to people, to serve as a guiding light and a source of wisdom to other journeyers on the path. If one of them is revealed, it is out of mercy for humankind, for were his knowledge, comportment, and disciplines lost, the seekers of *ma'rifa*

<sup>76</sup> Al-Sulamī's portrayal of this station is reminiscent of the Station of Extinction in Contemplation of the Divine (*fanā fī al-mushāhada*) in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī, who devoted a short treatise to this station alone. This work entitled: *Kitāb al-Fanā fī l-mushāhada* has appeared in translation under the title: *Le Livre de l'Extinction dans la Contemplation*, trans. M. Valsan (Paris: Les Editions de l'Œuvre, 1984). The text in Arabic is available in the 1948 Osmania Oriental Publications of Hyderabad edition (2 vols. in one) of *Rasā'il Ibn al-ʿArabī*, vol. i, text 1.

<sup>77</sup> In his short introduction to the *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* (p. 2) al-Sulamī refers to the journeyer in this station as a *muḥaddath* (one spoken to) and stresses that the *muḥaddathūn* and the *aṣḥāb al-firāsa* (the people of intuition) are saints who act as heirs to the Prophets and Messengers. He relates elsewhere (*Manāḥij al-ʿarīfin*, 20), that 'The *muḥaddath* receives inspiration (*ilhām*) from God, and this sets him apart from the rest of humanity'.

<sup>78</sup> *Maṣ'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 150–1; (Beirut) 389.

would lose their way. They are exemplars and mentors, a reference point and a shelter to the aspirants, just as the jurists are exemplars and a protection for the generality of Muslims. Of these journeyers who return al-Sulamī writes:

Then, once God has brought one of his servants to these degrees, given him refuge in a place of proximity to Him, bestowed upon him the intimacy of His remembrance, and made him a stranger to all other beings, He may reveal him to people as a model and a refuge to which aspirants might turn in their quest for Him. In this He permits the outward aspect [of the servant] to turn towards humankind as a mercy from Him to them. For were they to lose [access to] his knowledge, inner attitudes, and disciplines they would stray in their journey and their quest and fall into self-delusion. By the lights of those masters, they seek illumination, and by their counsel they find good guidance in their efforts to reach their goal. [Those returned to awareness of creation] are the masters of the people of divine Reality (*ahl al-ḥaqāʾiq*). They are the lords of hearts and lofty degrees. They are the points of reference for the travellers of the path, in them they find a model and refuge, in the same manner the generality of believers find a refuge concerning questions of law in the jurists. When God shows one of his saints to humankind, He causes temptation to fall away from him. Thus he neither deludes others nor is he deluded.<sup>79</sup>

Section seventeen treats those journeyers whom God has veiled from the eyes and hearts of humankind. They live among the generality as one of them. They have attained the highest degrees of proximity and discourse with God; there is no means of separation for them. God is too jealous of them to reveal them to his creatures. He reveals their outer aspects to humankind, while protecting their inner regard for Himself alone. He occupies them in affairs related to the daily concerns of the religion and their brothers. Such a one is, as Abū Ṣāliḥ said, 'by night a lamp to his brothers and by day a staff.'<sup>80</sup> This state of equilibrium between outwardly turning towards humanity while inwardly turning towards God represents, for al-Sulamī, the highest human state attainable, for it implies no preference or choice on the part of the servant, of the inward over the outward.

In this section dealing with the 'return to creation' al-Sulamī treats the issue of the possibility of error on the part of one of the saints and the

<sup>79</sup> *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, (Ankara) 151; (Beirut) 389.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Sulamī, *Risālat al-Malāmatiyya*, 116.

means of their restoration to rectitude. This is the role of the *Quṭb*,<sup>81</sup> one of God's concealed saints, who al-Sulamī considers to be the guardian overseer who is responsible for the hierarchy of saints. He writes of the role of the *Quṭb*:

Should one of the saints made apparent to men err, by a glance or a word—and he could not err beyond this—the concealed saint would return him to the straight way. He would either reveal himself to him and restore him to rectitude or befriend him (*yukhallīṭuhu*), while remaining veiled, and restore him to equilibrium by [the authority of] his inner qualities (*akhlāq*). There shall always be a Pole (*Quṭb*) among the saints watching over them. The Pole restores one who swerves from the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*), to his path by either his inner qualities or the overwhelming nature of his authority (*qahr sultānihi*). Have you not seen how [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq, the most esteemed individual among the Islamic community after the Prophet himself, brought everyone [to the straight way] by his overwhelming authority when they differed with him on waging war against the apostates,<sup>82</sup> until 'Umar [Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb] stated, 'When God opened Abū Bakr's heart to war, I knew it was the true way.' Thus is the authority of the realized saints after him [Abu Bakr] from state to state and degree to degree.<sup>83</sup>

This reference to the Pole (*al-Quṭb*) represents one of the earliest mentions of this central figure within Islamic mystical thought.<sup>84</sup> As al-Sulamī relates, the existence of the Pole among the saints assures and guards for the journeyers the authenticity of their teachings and the disciplines they exemplify. The *Quṭb* achieves this through his exemplary conduct and the manifest nature of his authority.

In the final section al-Sulamī summarizes the itinerary and reiterates the primary foundations of the path, the Qur'ān and Sunna, calling upon the journeyer to bring his inward qualities into conformity with divine unity through surrendering his will to God's by the abandonment of his own ambitions and aspirations. Al-Sulamī, the mentor, promises a

<sup>81</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup>, art. 'Ḳuṭb,' F. de Jong. Chapter 270 of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* is dedicated to a long discussion of the *Quṭb* and his two *Imāms*. The attributes of the *Quṭb* cited in this chapter correspond to those of the *Malāmātiyya*, see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, ii. 571.11–574.33. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī (iii. 573) the *Quṭb* was always chosen from the *Malāmātiyya*.

<sup>82</sup> The apostates (*ahl al-ridda*) were the Arab tribes who refused to pay the *zakāh* that they did pay during the lifetime of the Prophet.

<sup>83</sup> al-Sulamī, *Maṣ'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, fo. 57<sup>a</sup>, *al-Sulamīyāt*. This important passage is missing in Dr. Ateş's edition.

<sup>84</sup> With the exception of *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, the compendia of formative Sufism (see n. 53, above) do not mention this important figure of Islamic mystical thought. The *Quṭb* is mentioned by al-Hujwīrī four times; see *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 147, 206, 214, 228, 229.

successful culmination to the disciple whose journey is laid upon the foundations he has just discussed and lauds the states and station of one who has attained to the degree of *maʿrifa*. Al-Sulamī ends the treatise with the following:

There can be no successful completion of the journey through the stations of *maʿrifa* without a sound beginning. He who has not founded his journey upon the Qurʾān and the practice of the Prophet (Sunna) will in the end attain nothing of the degrees of knowledge of the divine (*al-maʿārif*). If his commencement is sound, his culmination will be sound. If the culmination of his journey is sound, he will be brought from the station of turning towards God (*iqbāl*), to the station of God's turning towards him, and from the station of drawing near God (*taqarrub*), to the station of God's proximity (*qurb*) to him, and from the station of self-direction (*irāda*), to the station of God's choosing for him. Glad tidings to this servant, his state and station, eminent rank and high esteem. God could only grant him a more exalted state were he [the journeyer] to increase himself in humility and abasement, knowing, that [as the Prophet said,] 'He who humbles himself before God, God elevates [in degree].'<sup>85</sup> He thus seeks, through his own abasement, high station from his Lord.<sup>86</sup>

Al-Sulamī ends his discourse with Shariʿa and *ḥaqīqa* as the twin foundations of the stations of *maʿrifa*, a word of assurance for the journeyer, and a reminder that the lofty *degrees of the righteous* are only attained through humility and self-abasement.

## SUMMARY

The *Darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* is a treatise that elucidates the essential doctrine of Islamic mystical theology in the form of an itinerary through ever more subtle stations of experiential knowledge of divine reality. In this treatise al-Sulamī discusses the primary origins and epistemological foundations of Islamic sainthood, while reminding the listener that this station may only be attained through realizing the deceptive nature of the self and by becoming well-founded in the knowledge of the defects and deficiencies inherent in creation. Toward this realization al-Sulamī focuses his discourse on the three-fold Path of aspiration and the multiple stations of *maʿrifa* that lead to the Station of Realized Sainthood. Al-Sulamī first treats the spiritual disciplines (*ādāb*),

<sup>85</sup> See al-ʿAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafā*, ii. 317.

<sup>86</sup> *Masʿalat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn*, *Sulamīyyāt*, fos. 57a–57b, missing from the edited version.

emphasizing the initial renunciation of self in favour of service to the other. Then, he treats the interior attitudes (*akhlāq*) incumbent upon the *murīd* and calls upon him to bring his inward qualities into conformity with the stations he has been granted access to by surrendering his will to God's. Then, by divine grace, the journeyer loses himself in divine proximity and embarks upon the stations of the ninety-nine names, the mystic states (*aḥwāl*) of *ma'rifa*. Here the journeyer perceives the inherent imperfections of the created order and is drawn in intimacy to the perfection of the presence of God. Finally, from the intimacy that has made him a stranger to creation, he returns to dwell among people, either as a concealed saint, hidden among the generality of believers, or as a revealed saint and a spiritual mentor, a source of light and wisdom, for those seeking God. In either case, al-Sulamī affirms, the saint's inner being resides in nearness to God, while their outward appearance has been bestowed, through compassion, upon humankind.

## ANALYSIS

The *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* provides an opportunity to see the works and life of al-Sulamī in a rarely perceived theoretical context. While many of his works are examples of treatises of *applied* Sufism, this text bears closer resemblance to a work of mystical theology. In it al-Sulamī affirms the intrinsic unity of the Malāmātiyya path, Sufism and the Path of Love as facets of an integral whole, united by a single essential principle: the *faqr* innate to the human condition. This text, when contrasted to his other works, provides an exemplary exposition of both the inner and outer aspects of the teachings of the Malāmātiyya of Nishapur. The uniqueness of *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* lies in its explicit textual references to the flawed nature of the phenomenal world; a concept that is key to the Malāmātiyya teachings on multiple levels. This theme runs through the text, giving life to their doctrine and providing an important key to our comprehension of the precepts of this important school of Islamic spirituality. This statement of metaphysical doctrine coupled with al-Sulamī's detailed exposition of the stations of *ma'rifa* as they eventually prepare the journeyer for sainthood elevates the Malāmātiyya from being seen as a spiritual tendency based upon a pessimistic view of human nature to being a school of mystical theology.

In *Mas'alat darajāt al-ṣādiqīn* al-Sulamī has laid out an itinerary that takes his reader to the highest stations of proximity and *ma'rifa*.

He employs a minimum of narrative material thus giving direct expression to his own perceptions. His lucid discourse elicits a vision of the journey as though we are seeing it through the eyes of one that made the journey himself. Al-Sulamī accompanies his reader through the stations until he hears with his own ears the intimate discourse of divine proximity and sees that, ‘the locus of created being is never free of defects’. In the light of this perspective we are perhaps better suited to see al-Sulamī as others saw him and to situate his works as a response to the needs of those around him—a response that embodied correct inner attitudes and conduct as the essential conditions to the process of spiritual development.